

# The Independent

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## THE INDEPENDENT

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## PEARL HARBOR.

The History of its Acquisition.

ITS LOCATION, APPEARANCE AND OTHER CHARACTERISTICS.

An Unorthodox View by a Student.

(Continued.)

The existence of Pearl Harbor is without any apparently adequate excuse in nature. It is a body of salt water, but is neither sound, bay, channel, strait or inlet,—nor anything else of the kind for which hydrographers have found appropriate names, so, for want of a more accurately descriptive appellation, it is called a harbor. The prenominal "Pearl" is derived from the fact of pearl oysters being found there in small numbers and of uninteresting physical characteristic. Thenames Pearl River, Pearl River Harbor, and Pearl River Lochs are also familiarly applied to the water in question, but there is no more excuse for applying the word "river" than the word "ocean" to the place. There is not even a permanent stream of any respectable proportions emptying into the harbor and only one stream (scarcely more than a brook), which is not dry during more than half the year. The "river" is therefore a purely imaginary feature of the landscape.

In fact, all the streams on the south side of Oahu are but brooks, except that entering Honolulu harbor. With that exception, their insignificance is equalled only by that famous stream in America (Heaven only knows its location), for which the local congressman was pulling for an appropriation, whereupon the late lamented "Sunset" Cox declared that along its course, "you can't find a dam, by a mill site: and you can't find a mill, by a dam sight." Yet the supply of water to Pearl Harbor is considerable, numerous springs in the low ground contiguous to the East and Middle Lochs; and this water, before mixing with the brine of the lochs, is utilized to propel the machinery of several rice mills and in irrigating considerable areas of rice, bananas, pine apples and other crops.

The south shore line of the Island of Oahu lies in an almost exact east and west direction from the base of Diamond Head (Leahi), that most picturesque landmark at the south-east corner of the island, to the mouth of Pearl Harbor ten miles to the westward. Passing the poetic and picturesque shore of Waikiki, with its deep and feathery fringe of giant cocoas palms nodding above a lower growth of the intensely green and lace-like algeroba, (a species of the locust), with the beach guarded by a reef line upon which the waves break in a continuous line of foam, we reach at a distance of four miles a break in that reef line, through which runs the channel to the harbor of Honolulu. To the westward of the Honolulu harbor entrance the reef-line extends to a greater distance from the shore, while inside the outer reef are other and almost similar reefs or rather one extended reef, with ridge lines reaching to and above the surface at low water, in many places having overlapping ends, the whole giving to the locality at

low water a monotonous and dreary aspect, which at high tide gives place to a scene of thundering foam, rolling over an expanse of many square miles. And yet that inner field is navigable by very small craft when handled by experienced local navigators, though the deeper water of the open sea is almost invariably sought by the traffic, whether of business or pleasure, between Honolulu and Pearl Harbor and vice versa.

Pearl Harbor is peculiarly difficult of approach, when the normally calm condition of the ocean in its front is taken into account. Among the elements of this difficulty is that very calmness which habitually reigns upon those waters outside the reef, and the absence of bold headlands or other conspicuous landmarks at or near the mouth of the harbor, by which to steer a course, superadded to the tortuous character of the channel to the entrance, as now existing. It is well said, that one may reasonably imagine himself on the bosom of the Pacific, while in reality upon the shoal water that for several miles from the entrance to Pearl Harbor is underlaid by a deep bed of sand; and this expanse of water, while ordinarily placid during the prevalence of the trade winds from the north east, becomes a raging mass of breakers during the time of a "Kona" or southerly storm of periodical occurrence in these latitudes.

But to leave the subject of this sand-bed for a future paragraph, let us discuss the facilities for entering the harbor as now existing. Your correspondent on the occasion of his visit to Pearl Harbor for the purpose of preparing material for this sketch chartered a sloop in Honolulu, and with a brace of old sea dogs to do the navigation, and a few friends to assist in enjoying the scenery, the balmy breezes and the matchless beauties embodied in the ever-changing hues of that opal sea, glided out of Honolulu harbor on a lovely afternoon of April and headed down the coast. The peculiar reef formation of the locality makes a wide detour to sea essential to prudent navigation, even in the best of weather, and the day was well spent, when we arrived in line with the two objects which mark the course of approach to the entrance of the harbor. These are, the derrick of a salt-pumping establishment standing on the west side of the entrance, and a hump on the shoulder of one of the northward slopes of the lovely Waianae mountains, nearly twenty miles to the westward which pictures a chain of hills, bathed in the haze of the tropic afternoon, form an element of combined beauty and grandeur in the landscape, of rare and striking excellence; and amid the mass, Kaala, the giant of Oahu, lifts her verdure-clad peak 4000 feet to a close communion with the clouds. From the base of that chain eastward to the shores of Pearl Harbor, and of the outer sea, stretches a gently sloping plain, scarred and seamed by the torrents of centuries, but presenting, few or none of those scars to the observer from the deck of our craft.

With all available local knowledge and skill, the navigation of the entrance is studded with difficulties and dangers. A bar here, and outcropping of reef beyond; on this side a sand spit extending into the channel; and on the other rocky shoal—such is the succession of features encountered. But, after some preliminary grating upon the coral, and some polling of our craft off the edges of sand spits, the deep water of the inner entrance was

reached in safety, and gave opportunities for a survey of the surroundings, unembarrassed by the necessity of efforts to avoid immediate stranding.

From outside the entrance the view of Pearl Harbor is uninteresting and without notable feature. The scene in general, from the outside, is of a mass of shoal water, relieved by the foam of several lines of breakers, with a flat expanse of land stretching away beyond to the Waianae mountains on the westward, and to the Kona range on the north. Nor does this scene materially change until, as suggested, the inner entrance is very near at hand. Then the change is sudden, pleasing, and in a degree, wonderful. You see the low land which compresses the main artery of the entrance into a width of about four hundred feet. Just ahead is a stretch of deep water, about forty acres in extent, with gradually expanding shore lines, to east and west. But the central view is blocked, by the jutting, almost into the very gate to the harbor, of the foot of a long and irregularly shaped peninsula which protrudes from the mainland at the northwest of the entrance, a distance of nearly four miles, and forms the barrier which divides the West from the Middle Loch.

The picture is most inviting, as we enter the harbor and confront the peninsula directly ahead; its abrupt sides laved by a lovely and narrow channel on the east leading directly north, to Middle and East Lochs; while an equally beautiful channel, almost a facsimile of the first, leads to the northwestward, and widens into West Loch, leaving the peninsula on the right.

West Loch, while bearing in a generally direct line from the entrance, is sinuous to a degree, and but slight progress into its mazes is requisite to show a completely land-locked harbor; with the low, rocky plateau of Puuloa, Honolulu and the peninsula above mentioned surrounding you at all points. The average width of the Loch during the first two miles from the entrance does not exceed a quarter of a mile; it is sufficiently sheltered by the low surrounding lands, with their thickets of algeroba to present an almost unrippled surface in all ordinary weathers. The black and gray rocks which form its peculiarly abrupt banks, with the vivid green of the algeroba fringe, the whole set in the majestic framework of the Waianae and Kona range of mountains, combined with the opal hues of the water itself, to comprise one of the most lovely pictures of this character anywhere to be found.

After two miles of a regular, and picturesque career, the West Loch becomes eccentric in its shores, curves and indentations, to a degree which renders description difficult and comparisons impossible. It sends an offshoot into the heart of the peninsula on the north, that almost cuts it in twain; while its main body extends to a width of more than a mile; its waters shoal gradually; and several small islands dot its surface. At a distance of less than four miles from the entrance the inner limit of this Loch is reached, where the rich alluvial land of Honolulu sloping with a gentle grade from the Waianae mountains, form its shore.

Deep water prevails in the West Loch, which, except in its upper end, is exempt from shoals. During three miles on its course there is a uniform depth of 7 to 9 fathoms, except where a lava ledge, crossing from a point of the peninsula reduces the depth to 6

fathoms during a very short distance; and these depths prevail as a rule, not only up to the shore, but in many localities extend for considerable distances under the projecting surface of lava rocks; and ships of the heaviest tonnage, if once introduced into this Loch, could in many places lie along side the banks, and utilize the lava tableland for a series of quays.

(To be continued)

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